



THE
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

of Cincinnati
and
Hamilton County

800 Vine Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202-2071
www.CincinnatiLibrary.org

Phyllis Hegner
Assistant PR Manager
Phone (513) 369-4571
Fax (513) 369-4565
Phyllis.Hegner@CincinnatiLibrary.org

Richard Helmes
Press Officer
Phone (513) 369-6959
Fax (513) 369-4565
Rick.Helmes@CincinnatiLibrary.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Press Release

October 18, 2005

Sheriff Simon L. Leis, Jr. 51st Annual Veterans Day Speaker at Main Library Friday, November 11, 10:45 a.m.

Hamilton County Sheriff Simon L. Leis, Jr. will be the keynote speaker at the Main Library's **51st annual Veterans Day program**, set for Friday, November 11 at 10:45 a.m.

Simon L. Leis, Jr. has had a remarkable career spanning more than four decades, including his active duty as a U. S. Marine that secured Beirut, Lebanon in 1958. A graduate of Xavier University with a BS in History and English, and Salmon P. Chase Law School with a Doctor Juris degree, he has served both city and county government in numerous capacities, including Prosecuting Attorney for Hamilton County, Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, and for the past 18 years, Sheriff of Hamilton County. We spoke with him recently about his service to his country and to Cincinnati.

What neighborhood did you grow up in?

I'm a west sider from the word go. I've always lived in Western Hills, and that's where I reside today.

Has your father or other family members served in the armed forces?

My dad served in the U. S. Army during World War I.

What motivated you to join the U. S. Marine Corps?

I joined the Marine Corps for what it stands for: it's the most outstanding division of the Armed Forces, with great physical and mental demands. It matured me and made a man out of me with the discipline.

Tell us about your time in the U. S. Marines.

I was in OCS, a three-month program, and then eight months in basics school. Halfway through basics, you were supposed to choose what field you wanted to be in. I wanted to be a tank officer, but my C. O. felt I would be better off a grunt (infantryman), telling me there were no more spots for tank officers. Later on I found out all my friends got to be tank officers.

How long were you in the Marine Corps?

I was in the Marine Corps for three years of active duty, then spent six years in the reserves.

Tell us about landing in Beirut, Lebanon in 1958.

The United States has always had a reinforced battalion stationed in the Mideast. In 1958, President Eisenhower felt that the situation in Beirut, Lebanon was so critical that we needed to take over the Beirut International Airport. At the time, I was newly married, just a kid, and was being told I was going into combat. I remember thinking I was way too young to die. We hit the beach and stormed a fully operating airport. Imagine if today a battalion of soldiers stormed the Greater Cincinnati International Airport, which had planes landing and taking off, people waiting for flights, all kinds of traffic. That's what it was like in Beirut. We surprised and secured the airport without incident. My fears never came to be, but on occasion in downtown Beirut, insurgents would take pot shots at us. It was nothing like today in Iraq.

Why did you decide on a career in law enforcement?

My dad was a lawyer, and worked for Ohio Governor Herbert during the 1940s to bust up organized crime. I would be fascinated with the stories he would tell at the dinner table. Every time he went out, he always had two bodyguards accompanying him. Also, when I was in the Marine Corps, I was appointed Special Court Marshall Officer. It was what I wanted to be when I got out.

How has your military and legal background helped you in your present job?

I run the Sheriff's Department like the Marine Corps. When I took over 18 years ago, the organization was sloppy. There was no dress or appearance standard, no weight or fitness requirements. I believe that image is everything. It's stressed in the Marine Corps, and I stress it in the Sheriff's Department. If you look the part, well dressed, in shape, neat appearance, you will get more respect, especially in confrontational situations. We have been recognized as one of the best-dressed law enforcement agencies in the country.

What kind of impact did your military service have on your career or other aspect of your life?

One word: DISCIPLINE. I'm a very disciplined person. I do things by the numbers. I'm up at 3:00 a.m., at the gym at 4:00, go to bed between 7:00-8:30 p.m., then start another day. I haven't paid for a shoeshine since my days in the corps. I still spit shine my shoes to this day.

What is the most satisfying part of your job?

The department is an outstanding law enforcement agency, the premier law enforcement agency in the state, with the finest staff and most high tech equipment that helps us do our jobs. You need the proper tools necessary to run an efficient agency. When I bought our first helicopter, the media was very critical of that decision. However, having the copters is a vital part of law enforcement. When someone proposed the Bagpipe & Drum Corps, it made sense to me, and the costs for that were paid for entirely with drug money. Most of what we purchase is proceeds from drug busts.

You have accomplished a lot in the various positions you have held in the city and county. Is there one thing that you've accomplished that you are most proud of?

I was Prosecuting Attorney, one of the most powerful positions in government. It sets the tone and level of law enforcement. One of the things I'm most proud of was cleaning up the adult bookstores and massage parlors that were prevalent in Cincinnati 30 years ago. It took nearly four years, but it is still clean today.

Veterans Day: What message are you planning to convey in your address at the Library's Veterans Day program?

The public has to support the military and be respectful of our president. He has to make tough decisions to put men and women in combat, and we need to respect those decisions. It is everyone's right as an American to have their own opinion, and whether you agree with the war in Iraq or not, we have a moral obligation to help out countries where dictators rule and kill innocent people.

Anything else you'd like our readers to know?

I'm a simple type of guy who loves his job. I have no intention of retiring, although most people my age are. It's what keeps me going.

History of the Main Library's Veterans Day Program

When the Main Library opened to the public in January 1955, it was the first major public library built in the United States after World War II. It was also dedicated to the memory of all Hamilton County veterans who had died in combat since World War I. The *Book of Homage*, which lists the names of over 3,000 Hamilton Countians who died serving their country, was unveiled on Memorial Day 1955, and is permanently housed in the Veterans Memorial display in the Atrium. Addendums were added to include the names of 273 Hamilton County citizens who had died in the Vietnam War, and the names of two local veterans were included from the Gulf War. Each week a page is turned to remember those who gave the supreme sacrifice (it takes 33 weeks to view the entire volume). Facsimile editions of the *Book of Homage* are available at the Main Library, and can be picked up at the program.

The Program

Sheriff Leis' Bagpipe and Drum Corps will open the program by playing as they march through the atrium. The 70-member Walnut Hills High School Choir will perform the National Anthem and later sing a medley of patriotic songs. Also participating in the program will be the Western Hills Jr. ROTC Color Guard, along with area veterans groups who will present memorial wreaths. After the Lighting of the Flame of Remembrance, the ceremony will conclude with Taps.

#####

✓ **Our goal is to make our programs accessible to everyone. Please request ADA services one week in advance at 513-369-4400 (TTY 369-4409).**

✓ **Information about events at the Main Library and 41 branch libraries is available on the Internet site: www.CincinnatiLibrary.org.**